

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ROME 15934

LIMDIS

DEPARTMENT PASS WHITE HOUSE

WHITE HOUSE FOR ROBERT HUNTER AND DENIS CLIFT

EUR/WE FOR BROD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, VT, IT
SUBJ: VATICAN AND ITALY: CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS: BACKGROUND
MEMORANDUM FOR VICE PRESIDENT'S VISIT

1. SUMMARY: THIS MESSAGE PROVIDES A BRIEFING MEMORANDUM ON THE
PRESENT CLIMATE OF CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS, THE ROLE OF THE VATICAN
AND THE CHURCH IN ITALIAN POLITICS AND THE PRINCIPAL CHURCH-
STATE ISSUES WITH WHICH THE NEW PONTIFF WILL BE FACED IN THE NEAR
FUTURE.
END SUMMARY.

THE VATICAN, THE CHURCH AND ITALIAN POLITICS

2. BEGINNING IN 1958 AND UNTIL 1975, THE VATICAN AND THE
CATHOLIC CHURCH GRADUALLY LOWERED THEIR PROFILE IN ITALIAN POLITICS
IN LINE WITH THE VATICAN COUNCIL II PRECIPITS. CATHOLIC ORGAIN-
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IZATIONS, SUCH AS CATHOLIC ACTION AND THE CIVIC COMMITTEES,
WHICH HAD PLAYED ACTIVE POLITICAL ROLES IN THE 1940'S AND 1950'S, AS
COLLATERAL ORGANS OF THE CHRISTIAM DEMOCRATS, ATROPHIED. FOLLOWING
THE 1975 ADMINISTRATICE ELECTIONS WHEN PCI MADE SIGNIFICANT GAINS,
THE VATICAN AND THE CHURCH RE-ENGAGED VIGOROUSLY IN THE POLITICAL
PROCESS THROUGH:
-- ACTIVE CAMPAIGN ON THE INCOMPATIBILITY OF MARXISM

WITH CHRISTIANITY AND DEMOCRACY;

-- REVITALIZING CATHOLIC SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTION GROUPS,
SUCH AS CATHOLIC ACTION, ACLI, COMUNIONE E LIBERAZIONE,
ETC.;

-- PRESSURING THE DC TO REFORM.

ALTHOUGH THE CHURCH FAILED TO SAVE ROME FROM GETTING
A PCI MAYOR OR COMMUNIST "GIUNTA," MOST POLITICAL OBSERVERS AGREE
THAT THE CHURCH'S INTERVENTION PRESERVED 4-5 PERCENT OF THE
VOTE FOR THE DC ON JUNE 20, 1976. THE VATICAN AND THE CHURCH
REMAIN OPPOSED TO THE "HISTORIC COMPROMISE." THEY FEAR THAT
THE PCI, DESPITE ITS LIP SERVICE TO PLURALISM, IS STRINGING FOR
CULTURAL AND POLITICAL HEGMONY AND THAT THE DC, UNLESS
VIGOROUSLY RENEWED, CANNOT SERVE AS AN ADEQUATE COUNTERVAILING
POWER. THE LATTER ALSO EXPLAINS THE REVIVAL OF CATHOLIC
ORGANIZATIONS (E.G., CATHOLIC ACTION, ALCI, COMUNIONE E
LIBERAZIONE). THE CHURCH WISHES TO HAVE AN INDEPENDENT CAPABILITY
FOR SOCIO-POLITICAL ACTION.

3. THE VATICAN SINCE THE ELECTIONS OF 1976 HAS LOWERED ONCE
AGAIN ITS PROFILE VIS-A-VIS ITALIAN POLITICS. PUBLICLY THE
VATICAN DID NOT TAKE A POSITION ON THE FORMATION OF THE
ANDREOTTI GOVERNMENT BASED ON THE SIX-PARTY PROGRAMMATIC ACCORD
NOR IN THE BRINGING OF THE PCI INTO THE 5-PARTY "PARLIAMENTARY
PROGRAMMATIC MAJORITY" OF MARCH 1978. THE VATICAN, HOWEVER,
HAS IN PRIVATE OPPOSED THE VARIOUS STEPS WHICH
BROUGHT THE PCI INTO THE AREA OF THE GOVERNMENTAL MAJORITY
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AND CONTINUES TO STRONGLY OPPOSE THE "COMMPROMESSO STORICO."
THE ITALIAN BISHOPS, HOWEVER, HAVE BEEN MORE DIRECTLY AND
OPENLY INVOLVED IN ITALIAN POLITICS AND NEXT TO THE POPE,
THE BISHOPS CONFERENCE (CEI) IS THE MOST POWERFUL ENGINE OF
CATHOLIC INFLUENCE IN ITALY. AVVENIRE, THE CEI INSTRUMENT,
OPPOSED THE PROGRAMMATIC ACCORD AS "A WAY OF NO RETURN" AND
ALSO THE MARCH FORMULA. IN ADDITION, THEY PUBLICLY STATED
WITH REFERENCE TO BERLINGUER'S LETTER TO THE BISHOP OF IVREA
THAT THE PCI HAD NOT ADEQUATELY DEMONSTRATED ITS DEMOCRATIC
CREDENTIALS AND THEREFORE CATHOLICS SHOULD REMAIN WARY OF ANY
ALLIANCES WITH THE COMMUNISTS.

4. CATHOLIC ORGANIZATION: A REVIVAL - THE EXPERIENCE OF THE
9175 LOCAL ELECTIONS STIMULATED CONCRETE ACTIONS ON THE PART OF THE
VATICAN AND ITALIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH TO REBUILD THE DEFUNCT
CATHOLIC POLITICO-SOCIAL ACTION GROUPS. BY 1978, THE CHURCH
HAD ACHIEVED SUBSTANTIAL SUCCESS: THE ITALIAN CATHOLIC ACTION
ORGANIZATION HAS BEEN SUBSTANTIALLY REVITALIZED THROUGHOUT
ITALY AND ITS MEMBERSHIP INCREASED FROM ABOUT 250,000 IN 1970
TO 1.5 MILLION BY EARLY 1978. SIMILARLY THE CHURCH HAS
STRENGTHENED CATHOLIC ORGANIZATIONS IN THE SCHOOLS AND THE
TRADE UNIONS. DISAPPOINTED WITH THE PROCESS TOWARD REFORM

AND RENEWAL IN THE DC THE CHURCH, IN ADDITION TO PROMPTING
THE DC FOR REFORM, NOW HAS AN ESTABLISHED ORGANIZATIONAL BASE
TO ACT INDEPENDENTLY OF THE DC.

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CHURCH-STATE ISSUES

5. REVISION OF THE CONCORDAT - THE 1929 CONCORDAT BETWEEN
THE VATICAN AND (MUSSOLINI'S) ITALY WAS ENDORSED IN THE
1947 REPUBLICAN CONSTITUTION -- THANKS TO THE ATTITUDE OF
TOGLIATTI -- AND DESPITE ITS MANY ANACHRONISTIC PROVISIONS,
IT REMAINS IN EFFECT. AN ATTEMPT TO "UPDATE" IT WAS MADE IN
1971, BUT IT FAILED BECUASE OF THE DIVORCE CONTROVERSY.

RESPONDING TO INCREASING DEMANDS FOR REVISION AND A
RECEPTIVE VATICAN ATTITUDE, PRIME MINISTER ANDREOTTI, IN
NOVEMBER, 1976, REVEALED THAT JOINT VATICAN-GOI COMMITTEE
HAD DRAFTED A PROPOSED REVISION. AMONG THE PRESENT PROVISIONS
WHICH WILL BE ELIMINATED ARE THOSE WHICH: PREFER TO CATHOLICISM
AS THE STATE'S RELIGION AND TO "SACRED CHARACTER" OF ROME;
BAN DEFROCKED PRIESTS FROM PUBLIC OFFICE; REQUIRE GOVERNMENT
APPROVAL OF APPOINTMENT OF BISHOPS AND WHICH REQUIRE SPECIAL
TREATMENT FOR PRIESTS CHARGED WITH PENAL OFFENSES. THE CHAMBER OF
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DEPUTIES QUICKLY DEBATED THE DRAFT AND, AFTER APPROVING IT IN PRINCIPLE, AUTHORIZED FORMAL NEGOTIATIONS. THE PCI STOOD BEHIND BERLINGUER IN SEEKING ONLY UPDATING AND WAS EVEN WILLING TO EXPEDITE ITS APPROVAL IN THE SENATE ALSO, BUT THE VATICAN INSISTED FOR

THE MATURATION OF A GREATER CONSENSUS PRIOR TO FINAL APPROVAL. THE DRAFT MODERNIZES MANY OF THE PROVISIONS GOVERNING CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS AND THE CHANCES FOR PARLIAMENTARY APPROVAL THIS PAST SPRING WERE CONSIDERED VERY GOOD. HOWEVER, THE POLITICAL IMBROGLIO OVER THE FORMULA FOR THE CONTINUATION OF THE ANDREOTTI GOVERNMENT IN JANUARY-MARCH, THE KIDNAPPING AND ASSASSINATION MORO, AND THE RESIGNATION OF PRESIDENT LEONE DERAILED THE GLI'S PLANS AND NO ACTION WAS TAKEN IN THE SENATE. UNLESS POPE JOHN PAUL I REOPENS THE NEGOTIATIONS, BY ATTEMPTING TO INTRODUCE MODIFICATIONS (KNOWN TO BE DESIRED BY SOME CONSERVATIVE ITALIAN CARDINALS, WHO BELIEVE IT YIELDS TOO MUCH TO THE ITALIAN STATE), MOST VATICAN OBSERVERS BELIEVE THE PRESENT REVISION WOULD BE READILY APPROVED BY THE SENATE. IT HAS BEEN CLEARED WITH ALL THE MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES. HOWEVER, EVEN IF MINOR MODIFICATIONS ARE INTRODUCED, A NEW ROUND OF TIME-CONSUMING POLITICAL CONSULTATIONS WOULD BE NECESSARY.

6. ABORTION - ABORTION WAS LEGALIZED BY THE ITALIAN PARLAMENT IN MAY 1978, DESPITE THE STRONG OPPOSITION BY THE POPE, THE VATICAN AND THE BISHOPS CONFERENCE. THE CHURCH HAS SINCE THEN URGED CATHOLIC DOCTORS, MEDICAL PERSONNEL AND HOSPITALS TO CLAIM "OBJECTION ON BASIS OF CONSCIENCE" -- WHICH IS LEGALLY PERMITTED -- AND THUS ABSTAIN FROM TAKING ANY PART IN ABORTIONS. THIS EFFORT HAS BEEN BRANDED AS SABOTAGE OF A STATE LAW BY PRO-ABORTIONISTS. THE SUMMER LULL HAS PUT THE ISSUE ON A BACKBURNER BUT OBSERVERS EXPECT IMMINENTLY ACRIMONIOUS POLEMICS ON THE ISSUE BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND

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PRO-ABORTIONISTS.

7. CATHOLIC EDUCATION AND ASSISTANCE - IN MANY OF THE REGIONS WHERE COMMUNIST "GIUNTAS" HAVE TAKEN OVER POWER SINCE 1975, THERE ARE INCREASING DIFFICULTIES OVER TREATMENT OF CHURCH SCHOOLS AND WELFARE ENTITIES. SO FAR THESE HAVE NOT BEEN ON A LARGE SCALE, BUT THERE HAVE BEEN CHURCH COMPLAINTS THAT THESE GIUNTAS ARE DUPLICATING FACILITIES AND THEN REFUSING SUBSIDIES TO CHURCH ENTITIES. TO COMPLICATE MATTERS FURTHER, THE GOI IN LATE 1977 ISSUED A DECREE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF LAW 382, WHICH DEVALUES RESPONSIBILITY OVER PUBLIC WELFARE AND ASSISTANCE

ENTITIES, INCLUDING CATHOLIC ONES, FORM THE NATIONAL OT LOCAL
GOVERNMENTS. THE BISHOPS IMMEIDATELY SOUGHT EXEMPTION FOR
CATHOLIC ENTITIES BUT A SATISFACTORY SOLUTION IS STILL PENDING
AND COULD BE DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN.HOLMES

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